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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003116

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SUBJECT: MAC APPOINTS CROSS-STRAIT NEOPHYTE AS VICE CHAIR

REF: TAIPEI 02074

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reasons: 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: The Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) announced October 1 that Academia Sinica Research Fellow David Huang would assume the MAC vice chairman position previously held by Alexander Huang. A specialist in European local politics, David Huang has no experience in cross-strait affairs, and has never worked outside of academia. Huang readily admits that he knows little about cross-strait policymaking and the role of MAC in this process, but said he took the job as a favor to MAC Chairman Joseph Wu. While a respected political scientist in his own right, Huang is perhaps best known for being the son of former Central Election Commissioner George Huang. End Summary.

New kid on the block

2. (C) MAC Senior Vice Chairman Chiu Tai-san announced October 1 the appointment of David Huang (Wei-feng) to fill the post of Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) vice chairman most recently held by Alexander Huang. The post is the most junior of three vice chairman positions and is responsible for Hong Kong, cultural affairs, and liaison with third countries. Huang is currently an associate research fellow at Academia Sinica's Institute of European and American Studies. Huang told AIT that his appointment is still awaiting President Chen Shui-bian's approval, but reasoned that MAC Chairman Joseph Wu must have secured President Chen's consent before offering the job to him. Huang admitted that he has no background on cross-strait issues, but he agreed to take the MAC job in order "to help Joseph."

3. (C) A specialist in European electoral behavior with degrees from MIT, Cambridge, and Oxford, Huang said that working at MAC would be a challenge for him. Based on the briefings he has received from MAC, Huang told AIT that he could not determine whether MAC is a driver or merely an administrator of Chen's cross-strait policy. He said that MAC appears to be setting its agenda based mainly on public opinion polls. Citing recent MAC polls, Huang said most Taiwan residents claim to strongly favor direct air transportation links with the Mainland. However, equally large numbers of respondents say they want Taiwan to proceed slowly with direct links and express concern about security and immigration problems associated with closer ties with the Mainland. Huang exclaimed, "With that sort of data, how does a government formulate policy?"

4. (C) While Huang said he was still in a learning mode for his new job, he did offer personal views on cross-strait policy that generally track with the Chen administration's stated approach. Huang said that President Chen's offer early in his first term to pursue "political integration" with the PRC was an opportunity for meaningful dialogue. Huang said that Chen would be committing political suicide if he used the term "unification," thus the integration formulation was the best he could do politically. If Beijing had acted on the offer, at least they would have opened the door to an institutionalized framework to pursue eventual unification, Huang assessed. Huang added that he believes the United States should take a more active role in encouraging Taipei and Beijing to come to the negotiating table.

Political Family

5. (C) Although Huang has spent his entire career in research and has no government experience, he has observed "hometown politics" first hand as the son of former Central Election Commissioner George Huang (Shih-cheng). The elder Huang is among the most astute and successful "dangwai" politicians of his generation, serving two terms as a non-partisan Changhua County Magistrate during the era of KMT one-party rule. (Note: Huang's reputation, however, suffered a bruising in the sequence of signal switching the CEC sent concerning the conduct of the March 20 election and referendums. End note) The younger Huang said his father did not join the KMT because of his distaste for the party's authoritarian rule and because he had his own ideas about how to govern. George Huang's "distaste" for authoritarian rule, however, did not

prevent him from befriending one of Chiang Ching-kuo's sons and forming a "blood brother" pact with him. George Huang later won the political patronage of Lee Teng-hui -- some say through his sister, reportedly Lee's long-time mistress -- and has remained close to Lee to this day. David Huang said that his father never shared the DPP's ideology or the former president's pro-independence stance, preferring to focus on the practical issues of local governance. Ironically, the elder Huang decided not to cultivate his more intellectually-minded son for a political career. That mantle has fallen to David Huang's younger sister. A practicing attorney, she is currently running an independent campaign for the Legislative Yuan in Changhwa, the family's powerbase.

Comment: Amateur Hour

16. (C) The 30-something David Huang was tapped for the number four slot in the MAC hierarchy after the job had by turned down by former People First Party International Affairs Director Raymond Wu (Reftel) and at least three other people.

Huang's appointment is yet another reminder of how thin the Pan-Green foreign policy bench is. Lacking expertise in cross-Straits affairs and experience in government, Huang's main asset was a personal relationship with MAC Chairman Wu, a fellow cross-Straits policy neophyte. While MAC's role may be only a shadow of what it was under Tsai Ing-wen, the fact that Huang will be tasked with explaining a policy he readily admits not understanding himself is a reminder that the DPP government remains an amateur operation in many ways, even after four years in office.

PAAL